

Special Town Meeting 2021 – Finance Committee Recommendations

The Finance Committee has a responsibility for creating the budget for the Town, as well as providing for recommendations on articles in the Town Meeting Warrant. The committee reviews each article on the Warrant, listens to presentations, asks questions, discusses and finally votes for a recommendation. While our recommendations are printed in the warrant, we are presenting additional information about our recommendations in advance of Town Meeting. It is our hope and goal that making this additional information available will be of benefit to the voters.

Article 1 – Debate Rules [PY]

Recommend: Approval 9-0-0

This article proposes the adoption of procedures for Town Meeting. These are the usual procedures under which we operate Town Meeting. They provide a means by which an orderly and efficient meeting may be run.

The Finance Committee recommends approval of this article.

Article 2 – Financial Committee Reserve Fund [SC and EM]

Recommend: Approval 7-0-0

For Fiscal Year 2022 we initially recommended an amount of \$3,000,000 for the Finance Committee Reserve Fund balance. The purpose of this fund is to allow the Town to address unanticipated or unknown expenses. Its use is authorized by the Finance Committee based on Town department needs.

The initial amount was recommended higher than an average year based on concerns that due to the unknown trajectory of the Covid Pandemic the School Department and potentially other Town departments may incur a higher level of unanticipated expenses for the Fiscal Year 2022.

Based on new information from the School Department this fall, it has been determined that while still conservatively viewing the potential for unanticipated Covid Pandemic expenses, the amount of the appropriation for the Fiscal Year 2022 Finance Committee Reserve Fund could responsibly be reduced by \$700,000.

The Finance Committee recommends of this article.

Article 3 – Community Preservation Surcharge – Fiscal Year 2023 [EM]

Recommend: Approval 6-2-1

This article would continue the 3% Community Preservation property tax surcharge for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2022. Approximately 2% is needed, either from a surcharge or from the tax levy, to cover payments for Bedford’s existing Community Preservation debt.

The Commonwealth is expected to continue matching funds. The greatest match is given to cities and towns that approve the maximum 3% surcharge. Use of the funds, however, is restricted to open space, recreation, historic preservation, and affordable/community housing and cannot be used for other town needs. In November, 2020, Bedford received a match of 32.6%, the greatest possible match percentage, due to our previous year’s approval of the maximum 3% tax surcharge. The amount of state funds Bedford received was \$561,354.

Some concern has been expressed by committee members related to the lack of flexibility in the use of the funds, the delay in project completion due to backlog, and the accumulation of unspent taxpayer dollars in CPA reserve. Other conversation expressed optimism at a new funding mechanism for the state that would keep the match rate attractive.

The Finance Committee recommends approval of this article.

[Article 4 – Community Preservation Budget – Historic Properties Preservation Fund Transfer \[EM\]](#)

Recommend: Approval 7-0-0

Bedford is required to allocate 10% of the Community Preservation taxes raised to each of the following categories: housing, open space, and historic preservation. The remaining funds can remain undesignated, to be spent on one of the allowable categories (open space, recreation, historic preservation, and affordable/community housing) as needed. This article would allow the town to allocate an additional \$99,601 to historic preservation reserve fund in order to meet the 10% requirement. The resulting balance would be \$793,291.

The Finance Committee recommends approval of this article.

[Article 5 – Appropriate Funds for Shawsheen Valley Technical High School Assessment \[KD\]](#)

Recommend: Approval 7-0-0

This article increases the Town’s payment to Shawsheen Valley Technical High School by \$84,506. Seven more students than had been anticipated enrolled in this program. The Town is obligated to make this payment.

The Finance Committee recommends of this article.

[Article 6 Appropriate Funds for Bedford Police Officers Association Collective Bargaining Agreement – FY 2022-2024](#)

Recommend: Recommendation to be given at Annual Town Meeting

Article 7 – PEG Access and Cable Expense Related Budget - Fiscal Year 2022 Additional Appropriation [SS]

Recommend: Approval

7-0-0

This article if approved would appropriate \$35,000 to Bedford Community Access Television for payment of studio and office space at the Old Town Hall. The Finance Committee feels that this is a fair and reasonable expense which should be appropriated.

The Finance Committee recommends approval of this article.

Article 8 – Zoning Bylaw Amendment – Section 22 Great Road District [DP]

Recommend: Approval

6-1-0

This article revisits the 2018 Great Road District zoning changes, aiming to address weaknesses identified in the first few years of the new district zoning. The additional clarity provided by specifically allowing restaurant use as well as better defining sidewalk buffers will promote redevelopment in the Town's primary commercial corridor, a business-friendly aim supported by the Finance Committee. The committee also likes the continuing attempt to incentivize developers to build more affordable and car-free commute housing options in the few areas in town that can support the required density, such as the Shawsheen Subdistrict. The Finance Committee recognizes the challenges of defining a one-size-fits-all dimensional criteria template for these unique historic districts, and sees value in providing the Planning Board more discretion in allowing development which serves the public interest.

The Finance Committee recommends approval of this article.

Respectfully Submitted the Bedford Finance Committee

Stephen Carluccio, Chair

Elizabeth McClung, Vice Chair

Karen Dunn, Clerk

Tom Busa

Ben Thomas

Paul Mortenson

Erica Liu

David Powell

Stephen Steele